

# My Reason To Live

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Summary: When a young boy named Jakob is left on the steps of the Northern Fortress, nobody knows what to expect from him. While getting over his feelings about being a tossed-aside noble, the young princess begins to take a liking to him... despite the fact he doesn't like her very much in return. Jokamu.

## 1. Chapter One

\_The Northern Fortress was well-known as another castle of the Nohrian royal family. Nobody ever had reason to approach it, as it was out deep in the woods, and was not often occupied by the royal family. The staff lived and worked there year-round, and it was guarded all that time. \_

\_At the time, King Garon would sometimes occupy the castle with his son and heir, Prince Xander, and his younger siblings Princess Camilla and Prince Leo. The staff would all dote upon them, especially one named Gunter, when it was rumored that he had lost his wife and child to a village attack long ago. He cared for any children that came through as if they were his own.\_

\_So it was no surprise that Gunter practically adopted the young child that had ended up on their doorstep. Nobody could be seen in the surrounding area when a maid screamed out and two knights came running down to see what was the matter.\_

\_The child stood at the door to the kitchens. He was turned back, completely covered in mud as a carriage rode off through the forest, rapidly leaving the castle grounds. Two guards stormed out on horseback in an attempt to catch the people. \_

\_Gunter ran down into the kitchens, having heard the screaming and saw the boy, eyes hollow and his cheek bleeding. He instantly pulled the boy inside, barking orders around to get towels and a seat by the fire, clean water! The boy did not speak, merely let himself be

guided by the older man with ease. Eventually, they cleaned him up, and Gunter put him to his bed for the night.\_

\_ "What is your name, boy?" \_

\_ "â€|Jakob Morcant." \_

\_ Gunter's eyebrows rose. He knew the Morcant family; but had no idea that they'd ever had a son.\_

\_ "They're handing me off to this castle to be a servant." And with that, the boy fell silent again, turning to face the wall while Gunter eased back in his chair, musing on the Morcant family and why they had abandoned their son at the Northern Fortress.\_

\_ And then it hit him, square in the chest. This child had been left here and there was no way of giving him back to their family. They had no idea where they were, or who they were. The guards had not been able to catch up to the carriage in the rain, but now he knew they were the Morcants. Who did not want him and would, most likely, not take him back. This child was completely alone. And Gunter was not going to stand for that. Not when he was thinking of his own wife and child, who had been lost when Garon attacked it after he refused to not submit to his whims.\_

"Jakobâ€| what will we do with you?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>How did I end up here?<em>

Jakob always knew the answer to his question when he asked it. He had ended up at this castle because he was left there one night by someone. His parents rode down in their carriage, not even acknowledging his presence despite the fact they had ordered him to come along. And now, they were responsible for his current place of residence: at this castle, deep in the forest, far away from anywhere notable in Nohr.

The world was full of orphans. That's just how it is. He was just lucky to be hereâ€"

\_Thwack!\_

"Ouch!" Jakob cried out, while holding the back of his head and curling his lip at the offending person â€" a maid holding a large wooden spoon.

"Do you expect those towels to leap out of the cabinet and rub the princess' feet themselves?!" she huffed, and Jakob shoved a hand to grab a fistful of beautifully folded towels, dropping them into the maid's arms as he left the area, seeing the reason he was getting towels sitting by the garden door. Dirt completely coated her feet, and she was staring off into space, swinging them back and forth without a care.

Jakob felt his stomach turn. How could a crown princess ever handle being so dirty? He chalked it up to the age difference; she was only three years younger, yet was getting the chance to be a child.

No matter, he wasn't going to bother getting attached. He wasn't going to be here long enough, anyway. Being a servant in a castle like this had to bring about connections to better work where nobody hated him.

Speaking of hate, the maid from earlier shoved him aside, causing him to nearly fall over as he easily lost his balance. That always happened, no matter how often Gunter stressed that he needed to focus on it. He had absolutely no sense of balance, which he was oft reminded of by the cook when she said he "not only had two left feet, but was dropped on his head multiple times as a child." He hadn't been, thank you very much. The old man had made sure of that.

Pushing the thought from his mind as he stood straight, he saw the maid kneel before the princess and clean her feet off with the towels while chastising her about the state of them and saying that she could no longer go out and play in the dirt.

Huffing, Jakob turned and left the room, walking down a massive corridor to go find the library once again. There had been a book he was eyeing, and he was determined to get it this time without a member of staff interrupting him.

But the pitter-patter of feet came up further down the corridor, and he turned to see the young princess running up to him. Instantly, he turned back around and began walking faster, in an attempt to get away before she tackled him to the ground or something ridiculous that children always seemed to have a tendency to do when they were trying to stop an older person.

However, she didn't do anything, instead coming up and gently pulling on his sleeve. Out of breath, she gave a smile, and Jakob didn't bother returning it, instead asking, "Is there something you need?"

She smiled a little wider, and said, "Sorry. Catira was mean. She's like that."

Jakob pulled his arm away, tugging the sleeve out of her small grip and resuming walking. Yes, she was like that.

Just like everyone else in this godforsaken castle.

\* \* \*

><p>Back in his quarters, after going through the library and finding the book he wanted, Jakob opened it to begin reading. However, he found himself thinking about how he was going to leave this place. This castle would have to bring merit where he applied. And hopefully by the time he'd found a job, he would have gained a few talents, and leave a better worker for his new place of employment. At least this place gave him a place to call home, despite the emptiness. The only downside was really the staff and the royalty. All of them, complete nuisances. And the thought of his parents kept looming in his mind. They had decided to abandon him, and would never accept him back into their lives.</p>

There was a chance he could learn something from these trials. Life skills, cooking skills, something! But he was constantly told he was

clumsy, incapable, and would never amount to anything time passed. And it showed. He had dropped dishes, tripped over carpet edges, and failed to properly clean anything. These people had strict ways of doing everything, and he was going to do it well enough to leave this desolate castle. Even if that meant enduring these people for a few more months.

But while weeks dragged by, counting down the days until he swore to leave and never return, Jakob had not become any better at balance and at cooking, at cleaning or sewing. People constantly chastised his efforts, and twice, he had almost been smacked upside the head or beaten, but Gunter was always nearby when it happened and managed to pull him away. It took him all his self-control to tell the old man that he could watch out for himself.

One day, someone dropped a bucket and cloth on the floor as he descended the grand stairwell of the foyer, carrying a basket of wash.

"I'll be taking \_that,\_ Lord Jakob."

Jakob's face scrunched at the sight of this sorry servant, who called him by his title with a sarcastic tone. This boy was of pitiful birth, one of the maid's sons.

"You're going to be cleaning this whole floor. The laundry's got to be hurried down to my mother. Make sure you get every last speck!"

And before Jakob could protest, the boy was gone, basket with him and a floor to be cleaned. ªIt couldn't be too hard, could it? He rolled his sleeves back a bit more, and knelt down on the floor, starting with the edge of the stairwell.

About an hour later, and he'd made a lot of progress. But at that moment, Gunter decided to descend the stairs.

"You're a very sorry little lad."

"Why do you say that, old man?" Jakob quipped back. He had learned that this person would fight back his arguments, rather than dismiss them in favor of hitting him with the nearest blunt object.

"Did you even look at the floor? And your rag. It was most likely dirty the second you dipped it into the pail for the third time. The floor is covered in streaks. Bubbles are in the cracksâ€""

"All right, shut up! I am a young child! Look at how bloody massive this floor is!"

Gunter straightened, heaving a great sigh.

"Your temper is something we'll work on another time. Let's go. Wash that rag, find multiple clean ones, empty that bucket, refill it with soap, too. I can't imagine why \_you're\_ doing this, but I suppose I'll hear about it soon."

Jakob thought to fight back the order and tell him all about the maid's son, but bit his tongue and went to refill the bucket, deciding that for once in his life, a silver-tongued response could

wait while he got everything together in an attempt to remedy this awful day.

And then the day got worse. Like it always did when something went wrong.

He was walking down the hall, doing his best to balance the stack of rags in his arms, and saw the princess and her sister, Lady Camilla, at the end of the hall. Jakob had met the edler princess before. She was the one more prone to giving servants hugs, particularly those who were considered "young" and "handsome". Therefore, she was adored by all the staff. Unlike him.

But today was different. Lady Camilla grabbed the princess' arm, yanking her violently towards her to whisper something into her ear.

Jakob didn't hear it, but he knew they were talking about him. And instantly, he felt insulted. How could the two just go on gossiping about him like that! Right in front of him!

And oh, her majesty, her royal princess. Yes, she too was smiling, but looked a little sad about it. But only she would pity him when someone made jokes towards his person.

Tears came to his eyes. They weren't supposed to be there, and instead of facing the three who were talking about him, Jakob threw the rags to the ground and ran in the other direction, down the stairwell to the ground floor where the servants slept.

Instantly blowing it out of proportion, he chucked the book on his bed at the wall, hitting with a resounding noise that made him feel the slightest bit better.

And the noise that followed was not one he expected to hear.

The door creaked open, and he saw the young lady standing there, a frown on her face. No, not Lady Camilla-

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?" he sneered back, knowing that because they were alone, he could freely speak without fear of having his ears boxed for speaking to her in such a manner.

"Because you seemed to get mad that we were talking about you."

"Of course I did. If I called you stupid in front of the staff, you would get offended and cry."

She bit her lip, but Jakob felt satisfied. He was older, physically and mentally. This little girl, only ten years old, had nothing on him.

"Cammy feels bad for you."

Jakob paused, eyes widening as he processed those words. They felt bad for him?

"No you don't."

"Cammy doesn't like how they yell and hurt you. She said that nobody deserves that."

Jakob remained silent, turning around so that he wasn't looking her in the eyes. He wasn't going to grace this pointless conversation with a response.

Only when the door finally clicked shut did he begin to cry. And he cried until the knocking started up again, firmer this time. He knew who's this was.

"Go away, old man!" He choked on his last words, finding his throat stuck from crying.

"You're got a lot to prove about cleaning floors. You've been here a month and shown absolutely no progress. Get out here right now and find out where you tossed those rags."

Jakob debated staying in the room forever, but when the door handle began to turn, he cried out, "All right, all right! I'm coming, I'm coming!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Three months. Twenty-one broken dishes! One dented silver and gold platter! Burned food! Awful sewing! Chickens not fed! Eggs cracked! Floors scratched!"</p>

And a boxed ear, Jakob thought to himself, he held in an attempt to make the pain go away. He had worked so hard to improve, so hard to try and be a good servant so that he might learn something. So that the old man might stop yelling and being so frightening. So that he could leave this castle behindâ€|!

"I'll just turn you out now; nobody will be missing you."

"...Excuse me?"

The young voice, clear as a bell, sounded from behind the maid. She turned, and gave Jakob a clear view of the angel's voice.

A little princess, who was now extending her hand.

"I'm looking for someone to chat with. I want to talk to him." Her finger was directed right at Jakob, who was standing in the doorway of the kitchen where he had been left just a few weeks ago. And here was the ten-year-old princess, requesting his presence.

"No, milady, you don't want him-" The maid attempted to lead her away, but Jakob ran forward, taking her hand and kneeling before her.

"My lady, I will go with you to chat, if that is what you desire. I recall that yesterday, you wanted to talk about your favorite sweets. Come, let's goâ€|!" He pulled her aside and out of the kitchens, right into Gunter, who had just been coming in.

"I see you found him, princess." He smiled, and stepped past them, right up to the maid who had been about to sack Jakob and turn him to

the streets.

Jakob heard laughter, and looked down to see the princess was no longer clinging to his arm, but rather, was down the corridor, waving him along.

"Come on, let's go! You said we could talk about my favorite sweets!"

He instantly regretted every time he had looked to her with a scornful look, every moment he had ever disliked her.

In that moment, Jakob swore he would study day and night, and become a proper servant, one who could cook, clean, sew, and serve. One who could do anything.

For her.

## 2. Chapter Two

"You'll be needing a teacher. Books cannot teach you everything." Gunter had been waiting outside the library door as Jakob carried out his second set of books on etiquette, cooking, baking, sewing, cleaning, and all sorts of other things that interested him.

"I wouldn't want to study under you, old man."

Gunter took the top book from the stack and walked beside Jakob down the hallway, reading the title aloud.

"Etiquette in the Nohrian Court. Goodness, you will certainly have trouble getting through the first page."

"Shut up." Jakob snatched the book back, putting it beneath all the other books in his grip, only to have Gunter pick up the next one.

"Recipes for You and Your Kids. Was this really in our library? I wonder who put this there?"

"If you're done judging my taste in literature, I have some studying to do." Jakob stopped outside his door, where he could clearly hear the maid's son already snoring.

"It's a very late hour."

"That doesn't matter to me." Jakob never needed that much sleep in the first place. He just hated waking up in the morning, so it was easier to get very little sleep and spend all that time dragging himself out of bed, since his associate never did anything to wake him up.

Guther closed the door behind Jakob, but not before noting the massive amount of novels and books around his bed. He gave a sigh, making a silent bet to himself that within the week, Jakob would be coming to him, begrudgingly, in search of a teacher.

\* \* \*

><p>It took five days and prompting from his newfound friend to get Jakob to stand before Gunter and admit that he needed someone to teach him.</p>

"Books can teach me very much. But I only need an opinion on what I'm learning and you're the one old coot that I can trust with my mission."

"You haven't even told me your mission. You've simply just got a newfound fire in your soul that I can't seem to find a source for."

Jakob's hands behind his back clenched. He wasn't sure whether to tell Gunter his motives for wanting to become the very best servant that could ever be.

Ever since the princess had saved him from being sacked in the kitchens, he found that the debt he owed her was immeasurable. He owed her his life and respect, his complete devotion.

He wasn't just training to be a servant, he realized that day when playing with her. He was training to her personal retainer, a companion who would put their life on the line for their master or mistress.

Jakob told Gunter of his intentions, who nodded sagely in response before leading him down to the kitchens. Finding an empty section, he slammed the pot and tea leaves down before Jakob, who merely looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

"Make tea."

A silence passed over the kitchen, the couple of maids inside staring at Gunter and Jakob, who were glaring at each other over the pot.

"Leave us!" Gunter ordered the two women, who instantly obeyed and absconded from the room, while Jakob took up the tea leaves.

"I want you to make enough tea for the two of us, at least. And to make it a good cup. If you're serious about this, the first thing I have to teach you is how to make a good pot of tea."

The quiet came again while Jakob prepared the water, and began to bring it to a boil. The air was not tense, but Jakob was determined to make it so. This time, he was going to prove himself, and do it for her!

This proceeded to be followed by Gunter's strict disapproval of the tea, and he was then "properly" educated. Jakob found the entire process absolutely tedious, but each time he thought to snap at Gunter, he was reminded of his mission to serve the princess who had so kindly saved him, and didn't, instead taking his advice and improving his tea technique.

The second cup was already better than the last.

\* \* \*

><p>"You take the needle and the thread. Wet it in your

mouth."<p>

Gunter had suggested that the best way to understand what he was doing was to teach the princess new skills. It not only occupied time and gave her company in the lonely fortress. He also thought that Gunter was doing it so that it might control his temper, but Jakob at this point couldn't even imagine lashing out at this person to whom he owed his very life " so this time allowed him to get closer to her and see her preferences.

She enjoyed dresses, but simple colors. Her favorite tea was "anything he made", but he could tell her weakness was honey and sugar being added. She disliked wearing shoes, instead choosing to take them off as often as possible. There was always something new he was finding out about her.

And today, it was that she had trouble getting the thread through the eye of the needle.

"Here." Jakob reached out, briefly asking her permission to assist, and when granted, took her hands in his and helped guide the sopping wet thread through the eye of the needle; something he had been working on last night for an hour until he could do it perfectly.

"Now, you try it."

She got it right on the second try. He praised her abilities, only to be praised back for his help. Jakob found himself touched - She had praised him! He would never quite get used to hearing her kind compliments and sweet comments about his duties. He still had so much to learn, so far to go, before he could call himself a capable servant.

However, the time to prove himself would come sooner than he thought.

A few days after the princess' eleventh birthday, the castle unexpectedly received two new servants. Two young ladies showed up, one with pink hair, and the other with blue. The rumors spread quickly about the former's clumsiness and the latter's capable nature, and how they kept close to themselves. The princess was instantly curious and wanted to meet them, but Gunter told her that she had to stay back and wait a day, because he wanted to make sure that the King had indeed meant to assign them to the castle, because more and more of the staff were being steadily taken away as the princess grew older and the core staff were able to take on more tasks such as cooking and entertaining.

However, she insisted on meeting them to Jakob, who found himself unable to refuse the request. He took her down to meet them in the servant's dining room, where they were setting places for dinner.

Suddenly, the pink-haired one caught herself on the leg of a chair, and nearly tipped over. Her sister was too far away and unable to stop her from falling. Realizing this, Jakob ran forward and caught the pink-haired maiden, while the couple plates she was holding fell onto the carpet with a bounce.

"Are you all right? You call yourself a maid with that sort of performance? Who even trained you?!" Jakob instantly reprimanded the girl, who looked as if she was about to cry.

"Hey!" The blue-haired one had reached them now, and was holding out a knife in her hand. The air in the room suddenly cooled down, and Jakob felt a chill run down his spine. When had it gotten so drafty in the room?

Then the answer was clear. The knife the girl was holding began to frost, and he remembered reading about a Nohrian Ice Tribe's people who lived far within the snow and had control over that element. How had they arrived here? These people always did their best to be as separated from Nohr as possible.

"Wait just a moment!" but Jakob found himself unable to finish while the pink-haired girl began to push him away, and her hands were cold to the touch, freezing his body."

"Stop!"

The small voice came again in the face of conflict, and she stood in the doorway, head bowed and eyes squeezed shut. The entire room stood still while she took a deep breath and composed herself, and began to talk.

"We don't need to fight. Here. We haven't even introduced ourselves!" She came over and plopped herself right down on the floor, smoothing her dress out. "What's your name?"

"F-Felicia." She knelt next to the princess, turning to the servant who had prevented her from falling to the ground. "What's your name?"

Jakob felt like the entire thing was a ridiculous notion, but because it was his mistress doing this, he chose to not vocalize his displeasure.

"Jakob. And yours, my lady?" He turned to the blue-haired girl, who was still clutching the knife, now coated in ice.

"Flora. And I know\_ your\_ name, little princess, so I would prefer to not hear it. I've heard enough of it from the soldiers." She stalked out, leaving the other three sitting on the floor to watch her leave.

"Here! We'll help you finish setting the table! Jakob, could you get the silverware we're missing?"

"Of course, milady." He bowed slightly and departed, silently congratulating himself on a bow that he was sure even the old man would have been proud of.

When he arrived at the cabinet, he found Flora there, drawer open and standing still before it.

"Flora, I might ask why you were so rude towards the princess."

She shut the drawer with a slam, and Jakob was instantly moving to her side, but found himself stopped by a violent wind.

"H-hey!" he yelled, while it whistled past him.

"You don't need to concern yourself with our affairs. Please excuse me."

She released the spell when she left again, and he found himself staring after her, wondering what could have happened.

The princess had more luck in talking to the maid, staying in the other room with Felicia, who she was helping set the plates out with.

"See, my sister and I are able to use ice magic! It's just something we're both able to doâ€| but Flora's far better at it than I am." She trailed off, before picking up the conversation again. "Thank you for helping me set the table! I would have hated to drop the plates againâ€|"

"No problem! I like helping. Gunter doesn't let me do it, and Jakob's always a bit of a pushover when it comes to letting me do things on my ownâ€""

"A pushover?" He loomed behind her, causing her to squeal and duck under the table, Jakob bending down to see her hiding underneath.

"Ahhh! I didn't mean it that badly!"

Felicia started to laugh, while Jakob made the move to crawl under, but not before the princess bolted out and ran through the doorway, giggling the whole time.

\* \* \*

><p>"I want them to stay."</p>

Those were the first words Gunter received when he arrived back at the castle, having confirmed that, indeed, Felicia and Flora were to stay.

"Ah, oh you've met with them already?" He gave a slight laugh, kneeling down to the princess' level. "Jakob, did you not keep her away?"

"I did my best, old man! Don't expect any thanks from you vanishing like that. She requested to see them, and who am I to refuse a request from her?"

Gunter shook his head, but was smiling, telling Jakob that he didn't think ill of the princess meeting the two new maids at all.

"Why don't you head upstairs and find the book you want Jakob to read tonight, and he will meet you up there?"

"Okay!" She turned and ran up the massive staircase, and Jakob turned to Gunter, knowing that he had something to say.

"What, is my bow upon your return not perfect? Was a bit of her hair out of place?"

"On the contrary, you seem to be holding things together. And your bow has improved. No, this is about the maids."

"Felicia and Flora? The former seems fine, the blue-haired one is the one I'm worried about. Neither of them quite have a grip on their powers."

"Yes, well, they're to stay here. Do what you can to make them feel welcome."

Jakob sighed. "Well, that's good to know, but a bit late. I can't say we got off to a very good start."

He recounted the events of that day to Gunter, who listened silently, nodding when appropriate.

"It seems we will have a long way to go."

"Indeed."

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm being replaced?!"</p>

"Silence!" Gunter's tone instantly silenced the boy. Jakob fumed quietly, listening to the sound of the princess instantly bonding with this brown haired child who was getting his greys already.

Gunter swallowed, knowing that what he was about to tell Jakob might make him quietly furious, or go into the room and observe the boy until he unnerved him enough to leave.

"Silas was chosen to be a playmate for her. Lord Xander was concerned that his sister was not getting enough human interactionâ€"" Jakob snorted, "â€"and therefore, assigned her a playmate named Silas. You will be respectful and kind towards him, for her sake and Lord Xander's."

"Of course, old man. I'll be just as respectful as I am towards you."

"Jakobâ€|"

He turned and walked down the hall, deciding to just read in the library or find something to work on. He could read up on smiting work, or figure out how to settle his temper which always got to him. He wasn't being replaced. This boy just happened to be her age, and that was why they were selected to be playmates. Most likely the son of some ranking noble to be chosen for the task.

While reading up on different metals and their uses, he heard them approaching the library. The princess was obviously leading, and the boy protesting.

"No, come on, it's fine! We can go wherever we want! Uncle Gunter said that the old mean lady doesn't work here anymore, so come on! I want to introduce you to Jakob! He's gotta be here somewhere. Then he can tell us where Felicia and Flora are!"

Jakob slammed the book shut, prepared himself to bow for this new playmate. Respectful. Kind. Respectful and kind for Ladyâ€”

"Jakob!" Her voice pushed the thoughts away as she took his arm, ruining his posture. "This is Silas. He's going to come by at times to play with me."

Jakob bowed slightly, and the boy waved back. "Hello!"

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance." Jakob didn't like the vibe he got from the boy. He was giving off a happy-go-lucky vibe. A carefree nature.

Suited her just fine, since she wanted to take him elsewhere.

"Have you seen Felicia and Flora?"

"I have seen neither of them, milady. I would gather that at this hour, they're downstairs setting the table."

"Okay! Let's go!" She took Silas's hand and pulled him out, Silas giving a quick good-bye wave that Jakob did not return.

Oh, yes. He did not like him.

Jakob's suspicions about him were later confirmed when he saw them looking out the kitchen door between breakfast and lunch.

"What are you doing?"

Silas jumped, and his lady just turned to see Jakob, also looking a little shocked.

"We'reâ€” we're justâ€”!" Silas could not muster an excuse, and Jakob raised an eyebrow, placing the princess' breakfast tray on the table and crossing his arms.

"Well? Can you tell me what you're planning?"

"He won't tattle, Silas!"

Only if you request me not to, milady, Jakob thought to himself. Her orders overrode everything else in his mind, unless it came to her safety and she was making a rash choice.

"We're going out to a pond in the forest with fish in it!" she said simply, and Silas began to freak out, covering her mouth, but she pushed it off. "Don't tell Gunter!"

There it was. Her order. "Be back within a couple hours. You know that you are not meant to leave the castle, Ladyâ€”?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know! I'll be back in a couple hours! Before lunch! Promise!" With that, she took Silas's hand and pulled him out, and Jakob shut the door behind themâ€” before opening it again and wondering if he should follow them.

He would give them two hours.

\* \* \*

><p>Luckily for Silas's head, they returned in an hour and a half, out of breath and a smile across her face. If she had been in any other state, he would have to answer to the new dagger techniques Jakob had been working on in his limited spare time.</p>

"Well?" He held out the wash basin and cloth to the princess first.  
"How was it?"

"Amazing!" Her shoes, clutched in her hand, were placed onto the table while she washed her face and hands, finding that there was a new tear in her dress.

"Gods!" Jakob knelt down instantly, evaluating the rip and deciding how much would be needed to fix it so that you couldn't even tell it had happened. At all costs, he had to make sure that Gunter did not find out what had happened. She was in one piece, as requested, and he was on her orders to not tell. If he told, then she might not trust him, which would put him in a difficult position for later accomplishing his goal of earning her total trust and staying by her side forever.

"There were so many fish! You should have come with us, Jakob!"

He merely went, "Hm," before standing again. "Go change, milady, lest Gunter sees that tear and begins to put two and two together."

"Okay!" She grinned and ran out of the room, forgetting her shoes. Jakob made a mental note to return them later, and turned to Silas, who was looking at him.

"What do you want?"

The sudden change in tone sent a chill down Silas's spine, and he did his best to stand straight, like his father and mother did when they were being knights. "I want to knowâ€¦ knowâ€¦ that you're not going to tell."

Jakob smiled, shaking his head in a dismissive manner. "Don't you worry yourself. I am on strict orders from the princess herself. Your secret is safe until it puts her in danger."

"â€¦Understood."

However, the secret didn't stay safe for long. Someone, who was not him, had somehow figured out that the princess had left the castle and interrogated the young boy to no end, and he was dismissed. This caused the princess great distress, and Jakob found himself late one night in the library with her while she cried over the loss. Gunter had said that it might be best she spent the time with him alone to get over it, and that, she was twelve and lost a friend in her little world, it was only to be expected.

"We had a list going. He was going to write down all the places I wanted to go, and said that, when we got older and he got permission, he could take me everywhere!"

Jakob sighed. He could have easily done that for her. In fact, Gunter would have probably gone to King Garon and requested permission to make an outing of it. But, he supposed, the thrill of going out and doing it without anyone knowing was half of the excitement.

"Here, why don't we read a book? Perhaps he will be back?"

\_I really hope he doesn't come back.\_

"Oâ€¢! okay." She nodded quietly, and slid off the couch, going to find a favorite book.

And that was the last they had been heard of. Felicia later went to find Jakob to ask about something, and discovered that he was not in his room. She looked around, and then went up to the princess' chambers. He wasn't there either. A concerned Felicia went to Flora, who appeared to be even more frightened. She had steadily bonded with Jakob after their encounter, finding each other to be of comparable skill. She had come to care for him, but would never tell him. It had to be a passing matter. And it would never last, for they would soon return to the Ice Tribe. She believed that, deep down in her heart.

So, they ran in separate directions, combing the castle for them. Flora went down to the quarters and kitchen, and Felicia upstairs to the ballrooms and royalty's quarters.

Quietly opening the door to the library, she saw a pile of books next to a chair, and cautiously approached it, only to find a sleeping Jakob, with a sleeping princess resting on his shoulder. She smiled at the sight, and began to lift books up one by one to start putting them away while they slept. However, she tripped, and with a yell, Jakob awoke, pulling the dagger out of the makeshift hiding place in his boot.

"Who's there?!" He got into a defensive position, but only saw Felicia and the fallen pile of books before her, instantly deducing what had happened. Quickly putting the dagger away before someone arrived or the princess woke up, he went to help Felicia pick up the novels.

"Oh!" she exclaimed at picking one up from beside the chair. "This is one of my favorites!"

"You would read Nohrian fairy tales?" Jakob looked over her shoulder before collecting the rest of the books, and the princess was now fully awake, leaning over to watch them tidy up.

"Aren't they wonderful?" her eyes sparkled. "Knights in far off places, princesses who save themselvesâ€¢! "

"â€¢and magical creatures, myths of old!" Felicia's excitement rivaled the young girl's.

"We could start a book club! Jakob, Jakob, would you join our book club?"

He contemplated the decision, deciding that it wouldn't be a bad idea to start something of that sort. It might help her cope with the loss

of Silas, and would help Felicia settle in.

"Of course, milady. It seems like a sound idea."

"Then it's settled! We're gonna start a club!"

\* \* \*

><p>Jakob had begun to notice a trend in the staff. More and more people were leaving while he, Felicia, and Flora reported their growing list of talents to Gunter. They were not being picked to leave and go off elsewhere, or to the army.</p>

On the same day that he noticed this, Gunter called a small meeting in the sitting room. Jakob found that he, Flora, and Felicia were the only ones present.

"You all are reporting great progress in your abilities to serve," Gunter started the conversation while settling into a chair, motioning for the three to do the same.

"The King feels that it has come time for the princess to have retainers. He wants these to be the only people serving within the castle and are directly connected to her. You will be solely responsible for her safety and care--yes, Felicia?"

Her hand was raised, and she put it down when she began speaking. "On the subject of defense, Gunter, who will be guarding the castle?"

"You three." The answer was simple and gained eye widening and gasps from the group. "I will be personally instructing you in the rest of what you must learn. When your training is complete, the last of the staff will leave, and the four of us will be the sole persons responsible for her."

Jakob was beaming. This was what he had been working for. Being chosen among all else. He was down to now competing with Flora (extremely capable) and Felicia (not as capable) for being the main one by her side.

"You are all in good standing with the princess. You are all developing an extensive repertoire of skills. And I can tolerate all of you."

"You mean you've basically adopted us as family, old man."

Gunter chuckled. "Yes, I suppose that is right. I do feel like you are all a part of a family in this castle. Rebellious as some of you may be," he added, looking right at Jakob, who looked offended.

"Excuse me!" he said, not even hurt by the comment. This got a laugh from Felicia and Flora, who said that they, too, were fine with the agreement.

Gunter nodded. "Then, it is settled. I will begin with all of our lessons tomorrow. I will decide the best course of action for each of you."

"Do not let me down."

\* \* \*

><p>A knock came at Jakob's door. It was one he recognized as Flora's. Putting down the dress he was mending, he called, "Come in."</p>

She quickly closed it behind her, and sat down next to him on the bed. She was silent for a few moments, just watching him expertly sew the hem on the dress.

"You've gotten very good at that."

"Of course," he said simply. "I had to."

Flora nodded, biting her lip. Jakob felt the temperature of the room go down a few degrees.

"What's the matter, Flora?"

She took a deep breath, attempting to control her feelings and powers, before speaking.

"How long are you going to serve for her?"

Instantly, Jakob felt attacked. Was she questioning his loyalty to the princess?

"Why are you asking me this question?"

"Because I want to know." Flora looked to him with hurt eyes, and he finally looked up from his needlework, seeing the pain in her expression.

"I will not be giving up my position as her retainer to make you feel more welcome. I was here before you."

Flora held back tears. He had misunderstood. She was staying for himâ€| why? Why had she stayed this long? Why had she endured for all this time? However, maybe, she could bring the conversation around to thatâ€|

"I don't know, we seem to be quite capable. Felicia's a natural fighter."

"You seem jealous."

"I am not!" Flora took on an offended tone.

"You are an excellent maid in your own right. Your ice powers are beyond compare in my eyes. You are adaptable, a swift learner, and organized. Methodical. And a very hard worker."

Flora had never heard him speak highly of anybody except the princess before. He spoke down to everybody. And here he was, speaking so kindly to herâ€"!

"And on that note, I look forward to working with you. Now, if you will excuse me, I must finish mending this dress."

She nodded, getting up and smoothing out her dress.

"My life rests with her," he said before the door opened. "I owe her a great debt."

Flora didn't respond. Jakob turned and saw that the door had been shut behind her silently. He shrugged, and went back to mending, but found himself distracted.

What exactly was he working towards in terms of repaying his debt? What did he want to do for her? Did he just want the title of servant or retainer? Or something more? Something likeâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>"Jakob."<p>

He looked up from the wooden fighting dummy he was prying a dagger from. Seeing Gunter in the doorway, he yanked it out and tossed it a few times, showing off his skill.

"What is it? Here to approve my skills before her party? You know we're all becoming quite capable."

"Yes, I am impressed with all of your progress." Gunter sighed.  
"Sadly, none of you took up my lance workâ€|"

"We must have our hidden weapons. We cannot appear threatening. We all decided this. It would concern the princess if we always had a sword at our side or a spear on our backs."

"Yes, yes, I know. I didn't come here to talk about that, though. I'm here to talk about you."

"Me?" Jakob stopped tossing the dagger and instead stuck it back into his boot, watching Gunter ease himself down onto the bench.

"Yes, you're eighteen now, soon to be nineteen. It's time we talked about what you would like to do."

"That's not a difficult question to answer." Jakob stood before Gunter, hand on his hip while he drummed his fingers against his thigh.

"So you've given it thought. I'm impressed."

"Shut up!" He said it half-heartedly, as if he didn't quite mean it that time. "I've known for quite a while what I want to do."

Gunter bit his lip, not sure if he should dissuade Jakob or encourage him.

"I planned to tell her of my intent on her 16th birthday."

"Did you?" Gunter seemed to not quite respond, off thinking about something else.

"Have you got a problem with my choice, old man?" He raised an eyebrow, fully ready to fight him on this matter.

"None at all. But is this what you want? Do you really want to serve her? You've been so utterly loyal, so patient towards her. Do you intend to be with her forever?"

Jakob straightened slightly, holding his head high with confidence in his answer.

"I intend to serve her until the end of time itself."

End  
file.